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SUBJECT: IRELAND SUPPORTS VISA BAN ON LUKASHENKA

REF: STATE 46976

Classified By: Political-Economic Counselor Mary E. Daly; Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Ireland supports an extended visa/travel ban on Lukashenka and other officials associated with the fraudulent March 19 Belarusian elections, in line with discussions at the March 24 EU leaders meeting, according to Conleth Brady, acting Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Desk Officer for Russia and Eastern Europe, to whom emboff delivered reftel demarche on March 27. Brady said that the Irish Government agreed with the logic of reftel points that a widened travel ban should include Lukashenka himself, as the principal orchestrator of civil rights violations before and during the elections. Brady noted, however, that three Member States, which he declined to name, might oppose extending the travel ban when the GAERC meets on April 10 to decide the issue. He added that Ireland, and most Member States would not favor a visa ban covering key family members of culpable Belarusian officials, unless these relatives likewise bore responsibility for electoral abuses.

¶2. (C) Brady remarked that Ireland had reservations about the use of financial sanctions against Belarus, and he cited past disagreement among Member States regarding this option. Ireland's concerns were two-fold, he elaborated. First, economic sanctions ran the risk of harming the Belarusian people at precisely the moment when support for, and contact with, civil society groups should be maximized. Second, sanctions could play into the hands of the Belarusian government in its attempts to vilify U.S. and European "interference" in the country's affairs. Brady clarified, however, that Ireland supported freezing the personal assets of Lukashenka and other ranking Belarusian officials if it were feasible to identify their holdings in Member States' financial institutions.
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